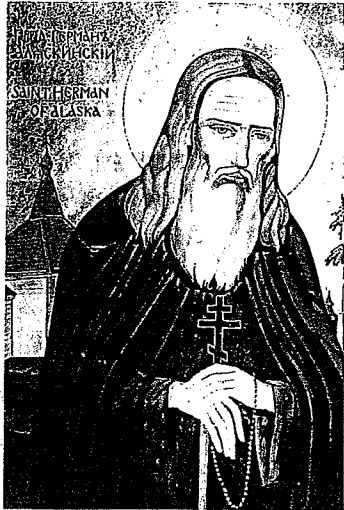


VENERABLE FATHER HERMAN. PRAY TO GOD FOR US



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 854-4235

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✠ June 17, 2012 ✠

All Saints of America

Martyrs Manuel, Sabel & Ismael of Persia
at Constantinople (362)

Happy Father's Day!

Many Years to all our Fathers and the Fathers of this Community!

Memory Eternal to our Departed Fathers!

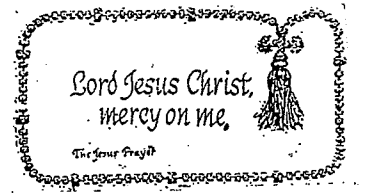
✠ Wed. June 20 – 6:30pm – Akathist Service

⇒ Fundraisers: Yard Sale - \$1,600 / Salvatore's - \$640

⇒ This Sat. June 23: Pepper Place Booth ~ 7:00am - 12Noon

The Kingdom of God is taken by force, and without forcing oneself, no one has received it. One must bear the burdens of others, and for this implore the Lord for patience.

~ St. Joseph of Optina



The Apostles' Fast continues...

✠ June 28 and 29 – The Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul

⇒ We will have a special guest visitor for the Feast – Abbot Fr. Gerasim Eliel

He is the recommended candidate for the Episcopacy for the Diocese of the South by the Diocesan Council. We will have a reception after Vespers on Thursday, June 28 in the Church Hall – an opportunity to meet Fr. Gerasim. He will serve the Feast with us.

HOMILY ~ About the Holy Men of God

"Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit!" (2 Peter 1:21).

This is witnessed by the Apostle Peter who himself was a holy man of God, a rock of faith and a knight of the Cross. As a holy man of God he, by his own personal experience, explains how the holy men of God spoke and what they said and he says: "They spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

However, they did not speak according to their own reasoning nor according to their own memory nor according to their own speculation nor according to their own eloquence but rather they spoke from the Spirit and according to the Holy Spirit. The wisdom of God flowed through them and the truth of God was revealed through them. Holy Scripture was not written with "the false pen of the scribes" (Jeremiah 8:8), but was written by the servants and the chosen ones of the Holy Spirit of God. Neither was Holy Scripture written by men whose writing was a vocation, but rather it was written by the saints of God, directed and compelled by the Spirit of God. Often, not even wanting and, at times even protesting, they had to write as the Holy Prophet Jeremiah witnesses saying: "I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His Name. But His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay" (Jeremiah 20:9).

O my brethren, Sacred Scripture is not of men but of God; it is not of the earth but rather from heaven; neither is it from the body but from the Spirit; yes, from the Holy Spirit of God. Inspired by the wisdom and truth of the Holy Spirit, these holy men of God wrote: Prophets, Evangelists, Apostles, Fathers, Teachers, Hierarchs and Shepherds. ~ St. Nikolai, from the Prologue

Unseen Grace

✘ "Whenever the mind is carried away and sinks down into self-conceit, whenever it imagines that it can do something on its own in this struggle, then the Unseen Grace which illumines it is immediately taken away and it is soon left empty. Straightaway it receives the proof of its own weakness, for the passions hurl themselves upon it like wild dogs seeking to devour it. It is wholly at a loss and, having no where to run for safety, it takes refuge through humility in the Lord Who has the power to save it."

~ St. Symeon the New Theologian

✘ "Before Holy Baptism Grace encourages the soul towards good from the outside, while Satan lurks in its depths, trying to block all the intellect's ways of approach to the divine. But from the moment we are reborn through Baptism, the demon is outside, Grace is within."

St. Diadochus of Photike (Philokalia)

✘ "According to the teaching of the Holy Fathers, the Grace of the Holy Spirit is manifest in two forms: firstly, as an external, providential Grace, which acts in and throughout the lives of everybody, enabling anyone to accept the True Faith; and secondly, as an internal, salvific Grace, which revivifies, redeems, and functions solely in the Orthodox Church."

Blessed Archbishop Seraphim of Sofia, Bulgaria (20th C)

Two Statements of the Orthodox Church concerning the Filioque Heresy:

"As soon as the Filioque was introduced into the Churches of the West it brought forth disgraceful fruits, bringing with it, little by little, other novelties, for the most part contrary to the express commands of our Savior in the Gospel – commands which till its entrance into the Churches were closely observed... It drove the theologians of the West, as its defenders, since they had no ground either in Scripture or the Fathers to countenance heretical teachings, not only into misrepresentations of the Scriptures, such as are seen in none of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, but also into adulteration of the sacred and pure writings of the Fathers alike of the East and West."

- Patriarchal Encyclical of 1848

"But the present Roman Church is the Church of innovation, of the falsification of the writings of the Church Fathers, and of the misrepresentation of the Holy Scripture and of the decrees of the holy Councils, for which she has reasonably and justly been disowned, and is still disowned, so far as she remains in her error... As has been said before, the Western Church, from the tenth century downwards, has privily brought into herself, through the papacy, various and strange and heretical doctrines and innovations, and so she has been torn away and removed far from the true and Orthodox Church of Christ."

- Patriarchal Encyclical of 1895

Why Should We Love God? ~ St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

God is the supreme good from Whom every good things flows, and all blessings that are and ever shall be. Without God all blessedness is cursedness and woe, life is death, joy and sweetness are bitterness. To live with God is happiness in misfortune, riches in poverty, glory in dishonor, and consolation in sorrow. Without God there cannot be true repose, peace and consolation.

Therefore, love Him as your supreme good and blessedness, love Him above every creature, above father and mother, above wife and children, and above your own self. Cleave to Him alone in your heart, and above all, desire Him alone because He is your eternal good and blessedness without which there is neither life nor blessedness in this age or the next.

Every creature of God is good, but their Creator is incomparably better. Love, then, and desire that good as it is existent without beginning, without end, ever-existent and without change, from Whom all creatures are created good.



Synaxis of the Saints of North America

On the Second Sunday after Pentecost, each local Orthodox Church commemorates all the Saints, known and unknown, who have shone forth in its territory. Accordingly, the Orthodox Church in America remembers the Saints of North America on this day.

Saints of all times, and in every country are seen as the fulfillment of God's promise to redeem fallen humanity. Their example encourages us to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily besets us" and to "run with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). The Saints of North America also teach us how we should live, and what we must expect to endure as Christians

Although it is a relatively young church, the Orthodox Church in America has produced Saints in nearly all of the six major categories of Saints: Apostles (and Equals of the Apostles); Martyrs (and Confessors); Prophets; Hierarchs; Monastic Saints; and the Righteous. Prophets, of course, lived in Old Testament times and predicted the coming of Christ.

The first Divine Liturgy in what is now American territory (northern latitude 58 degrees, 14 minutes, western longitude 141 degrees) was celebrated on July 20, 1741, the Feast of the Prophet Elias, aboard the ship Peter under the command of Vitus Bering. Hieromonk Hilarion Trusov and the priest Ignatius Kozirevsky served together on that occasion. Several years later, the Russian merchant Gregory I. Shelikov visited Valaam monastery, suggesting to the abbot that it would be desirable to send missionaries to Russian America.

On September 24, 1794, after a journey of 7,327 miles (the longest missionary journey in Orthodox history) and 293 days, a group of monks from Valaam arrived on Kodiak Island in Alaska. The mission was headed by Archimandrite Joasaph, and included Hieromonks Juvenal, Macarius, and Athanasius, the Hierodeacons Nectarius and Stephen, and the monks Herman and Joasaph. St Herman of Alaska (December 13, August 9), the last surviving member of the mission, fell asleep in the Lord in 1837.

Throughout the Church's history, the seeds of faith have always been watered by the blood of the martyrs. The Protomartyr Juvenal was killed near Lake Iliamna by natives in 1799, thus becoming the first Orthodox Christian to shed his blood for Christ in the New World. In 1816, St Peter the Aleut was put to death by Spanish missionaries in California when he refused to convert to Roman Catholicism.

Missionary efforts continued in the nineteenth century, with outreach to the native peoples of Alaska. Two of the most prominent laborers in Christ's Vineyard were St Innocent Veniaminov (March 31 and October 6) and St Jacob Netsvetov (July 26), who translated Orthodox services and books into the native languages. Father Jacob Netsvetov died in Sitka in 1864 after a life of devoted service to the Church. Father John Veniaminov, after his wife's death, received monastic tonsure with the name Innocent. He died in 1879 as the Metropolitan of Moscow.

As the nineteenth century was drawing to a close, an event of enormous significance for the North American Church took place. On March 25, 1891, Bishop Vladimir went to Minneapolis to receive St Alexis Toth (May 7) and 361 of his parishioners into the Orthodox Church. This was the beginning of the return of 35,000 Uniates to Orthodoxy!

St Tikhon (Belavin), the future Patriarch of Moscow (April 7, October 9), came to America as bishop of the diocese of the Aleutians and Alaska in September 1898. As the only Orthodox bishop on the continent, St Tikhon traveled extensively throughout North America in order to minister to his widely scattered and diverse flock. He realized that the local church here could not be a permanent extension of the Russian Church. Therefore, he focused his efforts on giving the American Church a diocesan and parish structure which would help it mature and grow.

St Tikhon returned to Russia in 1907, and was elected as Patriarch of Moscow ten years later. He died in 1925, and for many years his exact burial place remained unknown. St Tikhon's grave was discovered on February 22, 1992 in the smaller cathedral of Our Lady of the Don in the Don Monastery when a fire made renovation of the church necessary.

St Raphael of Brooklyn (February 27) was the first Orthodox bishop to be consecrated in North America. Archimandrite Raphael Hawaweeny was consecrated by Bishop Tikhon and Bishop Innocent (Pustynsky) at St Nicholas Cathedral in New York on March 13, 1904. As Bishop of Brooklyn, St Raphael was a trusted and capable assistant to St Tikhon in his archpastoral ministry. St Raphael reposed on February 27, 1915.

The first All American Council took place March 5-7, 1907 at Mayfield, PA, and the main topic was "How to Expand the Mission." Guidelines and directions for missionary activity, and statutes for the administrative structure of parishes were also set forth.

In the twentieth century, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, countless men, women, and children received the crown of martyrdom rather than renounce Christ. Sts John Kochurov (October 31) and Alexander Hotovitzky (December 4 and August 7) both served the Church in North America before going back to Russia. St John became the first clergyman to be martyred in Russia on October 31, 1917 in St Petersburg. St Alexander Hotovitzky, who served in America until 1914, was sent to the Gulag and died in 1937.

St. John (Maximovitch) of San Francisco (July 2) was a holy, wonderworking Russian Bishop in the Far East, Europe and America, departing this life in honor and veneration in 1965 in San Francisco at his Cathedral Joy of All Who Sorrow. He has worked many intercessory miracles since his blessed repose and is venerated by Orthodox far and wide.

In addition to the Saints listed above, we also honor those saints who are known only to God, and have not been recognized officially by the Church. As we contemplate the lives of these Saints, let us remember that we are also called by God to a life of holiness. ✠ ✠ ✠

We must be super-conservative in preserving the Orthodox Faith and super-modern in propagating it." ~ St. Nikolai Velimirovich, who served in America (+1956)

Do the Saints pray for us?

✠ "Do the Saints whom we call upon, pray for us? They certainly pray for us! If I, a sinful man, a cold-hearted, sometimes wicked and malevolently disposed man, praying for others who have instructed, or have not instructed me to pray for them, and do not doubt do not weary of saying their names during prayer, although sometimes not heartily, then will not God's Saints, those lamps and torches, burning in God and before God, full of love for their earthly brethren — pray for me and for us when we call upon them with faith, hope and love, according to our strength? They, our speedy helpers, pray also for our souls, as our Divinely-enlightened Mother, the Holy Church, assures us. Pray, therefore, undoubtedly to God's Saints, asking their intercession before God on your behalf.

They hear you in the Holy Spirit. When you sincerely pray, the Holy Spirit breathes in you, He Who is the Spirit of Truth and sincerity. The one same Holy Spirit is in us and in the Saints. The Saints are holy through the Holy Spirit, Who sanctifies them and eternally dwells in them."

~ St. John of Kronstadt

On the Intercession and Invocation of the Saints

by Reader Christopher Orr

Protestants often have a difficult time coming to terms with prayer to the Saints. It is condemned as a christianized paganism, an example of the corruption of Christianity after the conversion of the Roman Empire under Constantine in 313 AD.

This issue falls under two broad headings: intercession and invocation. Most Protestants would accept the fact that we are prayed for by the departed Saints and angels in heaven (intercession by the Saints), just as our family, friends, and clergy here on earth pray us for. The difficulty lies with our asking (praying) the departed Saints and angels for their prayers (invocation of the Saints). How do we know they can hear us? Some, High Church Anglicans, would accept intercession and invocation, but not the Roman "excesses" of this practice. The 1917 [Roman] Catholic Encyclopedia expresses succinctly the position of the various traditional Protestant bodies:

...the High Church Anglicans contend that it is not the invocation of Saints that is here rejected, but only the "Romish doctrine", i. e. the excesses prevailing at the time and afterwards condemned by the Council of Trent. "In principle there is no question herein between us and any other portion of the Catholic Church. . . . Let not that most ancient custom, common to the Universal Church, as well Greek as Latin, of addressing Angels and Saints in the way we have said, be condemned as impious, or as vain and foolish" [Forbes, Bishop of Brechin (Anglican), "Of the Thirty-nine Articles", p. 422].

The reformed Churches, as a body, reject the invocation of the Saints. Article xxi of the Augsburg Confession says: "Scripture does not teach us to invoke the Saints, or to ask for help from the Saints; for it puts before us Christ as the one mediator, propitiatory, high-priest and intercessor." In the "Apology of the Augsburg Confession" (ad art. xxi, sects. 3, 4), it is admitted that the angels pray for us, and the Saints, too, "for the Church in general"; but this does not imply that they are to be invoked.

The Calvinists, however, reject both intercession and invocation as an imposture and delusion of Satan, since thereby the right manner of praying is prevented, and the Saints know nothing of us, and have no concern as to what passes on earth ("Gall. Confess.", art. xxiv; "Remonst. Conf." c. xvi, sect. 3).

It was my contention as an inquirer into Orthodox Christianity—which accepts the intercession and invocation of the Saints—that if I was willing to accept the testimony of the Fathers of the Church when it came to such abstruse dogmas as that of the Trinity (three hypostases, one ousia) and Chalcedonian Christology (two ousia, one hypostasis), as well as the final canon of the New Testament Scriptures which was finally settled by St. Athanasius, then I must also accept their testimony concerning the intercession and invocation of the Saints. That is, if they had ever said anything about it. If St. Athanasius can fight for homoousios over homoiousios; and, in similarly abstract language Sts. Gregory the Theologian and Basil the Great could fight for the full divinity of the Holy Spirit, then certainly they would have commented on the error of the intercession and invocation of the Saints. That is, if it existed in their day. I vaguely assumed that this "pagan practice" must have developed later, or outside of the truly Christian spheres in which these basic dogmas of our faith were formulated.

This led me to a study of the Patristic sources to find if there was, in fact, early testimony one way or the other concerning the intercession and invocation of the Saints. Did major patristic figures such as Sts. Athanasius, Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian support or teach this practice? Was there only isolated testimony to this practice in Rome, Palestine, Syria, Africa, or Asia Minor separately, or was it widespread across the ancient world implying a common apostolic foundation?

I have compiled a less than exhaustive digest of Patristic and Scriptural citations concerning both the intercession and invocation of the departed Saints of God. I have stressed texts referring to our invocation of the Saints - of our asking them for their prayers. I hate to admit it, but I actually didn't do this research before I became Orthodox. I assumed there was no written testimony to be had until many centuries after the Church came out of the catacombs in 313-14. I simply prayed my way into understanding that the Saints can hear us. I was shocked to find that there was, in fact, testimony in support of "prayer to the Saints". And this testimony came not from some random, half-pagan "saint" from the backwaters of Mesopotamia, Cilicia, or the Pentapolis but from the defenders and promoters of the Nicene Creed: the Fathers who had suffered, struggled, and died for the doctrine of the Trinity, the full divinity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and who described this relationship in language too rarified for me to fully comprehend to this day. These doctrines most Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians still hold in common—in the face of all that we disagree on. The witness, therefore, of these Christian giants must be taken as more than simply "the doctrine of men". They prayed to the Saints without considering them to be demi-gods; they asked the prayers of those who to whom the Psalmist and Christ said, "Ye are gods."^[ii] Could the Church Which Christ promised would withstand the "Gates of Hades" really have apostatized within a generation of its freedom across the breadth of the entire ancient world? All ye Saints, pray to God for us!

Patristic and Scriptural Testimony

Righteous Job the Long-Suffering (1000 – 300 BC)

If there shall be an angel speaking for him . . . He shall have mercy on him, and shall say: Deliver him, that he may not go down to corruption" (Job xxxiii, 23).

Book of Tobit (~ 200 – 100 BC)

When thou didst pray with tears... I [The Archangel Raphael] offered thy prayer to the Lord. (Tobit xii, 12)

St. John the Evangelist (+101)

And another angel came, and stood before the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given to him much incense, that he should offer of the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar, which is before the throne of God. And the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints ascended up before God from the hand of the angel. (Apoc., viii, 3, 4)

St. Cyprian of Carthage (+258), writing to Pope Cornelius of Rome

Let us be mutually mindful of each other, let us ever pray for each other, and if one of us shall, by the speediness of the Divine providence, depart hence first, let our love continue in the presence of the Lord, let not prayer for our brethren and sisters cease in the presence of the mercy of the Father.

More from the Holy Fathers on the Invocation of the Saints

St. Hilary of Poitiers (+368)

To those who would fain stand, neither the guardianship of Saints nor the defenses of angels are wanting.

St. Ephraim the Syrian (+373)

Remember me, ye heirs of God, ye brethren of Christ, supplicate the Savior earnestly for me, that I may be freed though Christ from him that fights against me day by day.[vi]

Ye victorious martyrs who endured torments gladly for the sake of the God and Savior; ye who have boldness of speech towards the Lord Himself; ye Saints, intercede for us who are timid and sinful men, full of sloth, that the grace of Christ may come upon us, and enlighten the hearts of all of us that so we may love him.

St. Athanasius the Great, Patriarch of Alexandria (+325)

Christ became man that men might become gods.

"In one of his letters, St. Basil [the Great] explicitly writes that he accepts the intercession of the apostles, prophets and martyrs, and he seeks their prayers to God. (Letter 360) Then, speaking about the Forty Martyrs, who suffered martyrdom for Christ, he emphasizes that they are common friends of the human race, strong ambassadors and collaborators in fervent prayers. (Chapter 8)

"St. Gregory of Nyssa asks St. Theodore the Martyr ...to fervently pray to our Common King, our God, for the country and the people (Encomium to Martyr Theodore).

"The same language is used by St. Gregory the Theologian in his encomium to St. Cyprian. St. John Chrysostom says that we should seek the intercession and the fervent prayers of the Saints, because they have special "boldness" (parrhesia), before God. (Gen. 44: 2 and Encomium to Julian, Iulentinus and Maximinus, 3)."

St. Basil the Great, of Caesarea in Asia Minor (+379)

According to the blameless faith of the Christians which we have obtained from God, I confess and agree that I believe in one God the Father Almighty; God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit; I adore and worship one God, the Three. I confess to the economy of the Son in the flesh, and that the holy Mary, who gave birth to Him according to the flesh, was Mother of God. I acknowledge also the holy Apostles, Prophets, and Martyrs; and I invoke them to supplication to God, that through them, that is, through their mediation, the merciful God may be propitious to me, and that a ransom may be made and given me for my sins. Wherefore also I honor and kiss the features of their icons, inasmuch as they have been handed down from the holy Apostles, and are not forbidden, but are in all our churches.

We beseech you, O most holy martyrs, who cheerfully suffered torments and death for his love, and are now more familiarly united to him, that you intercede with God for us slothful and wretched sinners, that he bestow on us the grace of Christ, by which we may be enlightened and enabled to love him.

O holy choir! O sacred band! O unbroken host of warriors! O common guardians of the human race! Ye gracious sharers of our cares! Ye co-operators in our prayer! Most powerful intercessors!

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (+386)

We then commemorate also those who have fallen asleep before us, first, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, that God, by their prayers and intercessions, may receive our petitions.

St. Gregory the Theologian, Patriarch of Constantinople (Nazianzus, +389)

Mayest thou [Cyprian] look down from above propitiously upon us, and guide our word and life; and shepherd [or shepherd with me] this sacred flock . . . gladdening us with a more perfect and clear illumination of the Holy Trinity, before Which thou standest.

St. Gregory of Nyssa (brother of St. Basil, +395-400)

...I wish to commemorate one person who spoke of their noble testimony because I am close to Iborra, the village and resting place of these Forty Martyrs' remains. Here the Romans keep a register of soldiers, one of whom was a guard ordered by his commander to protect against invasions, a practice common to soldiers in such remote areas. This man suffered from an injured foot which was later amputated. Being in the martyrs' resting place, he earnestly beseeched God and the intercession of the Saints. One night there appeared a man of venerable appearance in the company of others who said, "Oh soldier, do you want to be healed [J.167] of your infirmity? Give me your foot that I may touch it." When he awoke from the dream, his foot was completely healed. Once he awoke from this vision, his foot was restored to health. He roused the other sleeping men because he was immediately cured and made whole. This men then began to proclaim the miracle performed by the Martyrs and acknowledged the kindness bestowed by these fellow soldiers.... We who freely and boldly enter Paradise are strengthened by the [Martyrs'] intercession through a noble confession in our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Do thou, [St. Ephraim the Syrian] that art standing at the Divine altar, and art ministering with angels to the life-giving and most Holy Trinity, bear us all in remembrance, petitioning for us the remission of sins, and the fruition of an everlasting Kingdom.

St. Ambrose of Milan (+397)

May Peter, who wept so efficaciously for himself, weep for us and turn towards us Christ's benign countenance.

St. Jerome, b. Dalmatia, d. Palestine (+419)

If the Apostles and Martyrs, while still in the body, can pray for others, at a time when they must still be anxious for themselves, how much more after their crowns, victories, and triumphs are won! One man, Moses, obtains from God pardon for six hundred thousand men in arms; and Stephen, the imitator of the Lord, and the first martyr in Christ, begs forgiveness for his persecutors; and shall their power be less after having begun to be with Christ? The Apostle Paul declares that two hundred three score and sixteen souls, sailing with him, were freely given him; and, after he is dissolved and has begun to be with Christ, shall he close his lips, and not be able to utter a word in behalf of those who throughout the whole world believed at his preaching of the Gospel? And shall the living dog Vigilantius be better than that dead lion?

St. John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople; b. Antioch, Syria (+407)

When thou perceivest that God is chastening thee, fly not to His enemies . . . but to His friends, the Martyrs, the Saints, and those who were pleasing to Him, and who have great power [parresian, "boldness of speech"].[xxi]

He that wears the purple, laying aside his pomp, stands begging of the Saints to be his patrons with God; and he that wears the diadem begs the Tent-maker and the Fisherman as patrons, even though they be dead.

St. Augustine of Hippo, in North Africa (+430)

At the Lord's table we do not commemorate Martyrs in the same way that we do others who rest in peace so as to pray for them, but rather that they may pray for us that we may follow in their footsteps.